

## Mercury Update

January 2003

### Overview

These "Mercury Updates" are designed to provide brief summaries on the most significant actions occurring in New England with regard to mercury. The EPA New England Mercury Work Group will provide these updates on a periodic basis. This update focuses on the following: 1) the disposition of mercury from the HoltraChem Facility in Orrington, ME; 2) an update on EPA New England's (EPA NE) efforts reducing mercury within the health care industry; 3) activities of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers Mercury Task Force; 4) an update on the MACT utility workgroup's final report; 5) updates on new funding for mercury projects; and 6) a report from a recent conference on mercury exposure from fish consumption.

### HoltraChem's Mercury Leaves New England

A negotiated agreement between Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), Malinckrodt, and Mercury Waste Solutions was marked by a press event held by NRCM at the facility on September 6. This precedent setting agreement allows 185,000 pounds of mercury

that had been left at the facility since September 2000, to be stored for a limited time frame. The mercury will be stored for a minimum of four years up to eight years. The mercury was shipped to a mercury waste solutions' facility in Wisconsin during September. The removal of this mercury is critical to the completion of the RCRA Corrective Action process at the site.

### Mercury Reduction Efforts in Health Care

EPA NE has been promoting the National Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) pledge and recognition program. In May 2002, EPA NE sent letters to all 280 New England hospitals. This mailing included our Regional Mercury Challenge partners directory, a brochure on the National H2E effort, information about the new EnergyStar hospital benchmarking tool, and information on the ULowell Sustainable Hospital project. As of September 9, 2002, EPA NE has 86 of the 321 H2E partners and 6 of the 32 H2E Champions.

Some additional work we are doing to provide information and assistance to the health care sector:

➤NH hospitals were given a briefing on the new

EnergyStar bench-marking tool on September 12, 2002

➤On November 6, 2002, a workshop was held for hospitals and colleges/universities on the new SPCC regulations in New Haven, CT.

➤In 2002, EPA gave two additional Pollution Prevention Incentives for States grants which included some hospital related work in VT and RI.

### The New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers Meeting in Quebec

At their late August meeting in Quebec, the NEG/ECP agreed upon a number of mercury activities for the New England region, including: 1) developing recommendations for completing mercury clean-outs in schools; 2) continuing with efforts to reduce mercury through developing and implementing model mercury legislation; and 3) completing an assessment on the region's progress to meeting the 50% reduction target for mercury emissions by 2003. As part of this latter effort, EPA will be providing support to NESCAUM to assist with developing a revised mercury inventory. The NEG/ECP also resolved that we should implement the recommendations in the summary report "Mercury

Deposition in Northeast States and Eastern Provinces: Network Assessment and Recommendations.” The NEG/ECP Mercury Task Force will be meeting in Portland in early November to discuss the implementation of it’s newest work plan.

#### **New Mercury Projects Funded in New England**

EPA New England is anticipating funding for a number of mercury projects.

The University of Massachusetts, Lowell Sustainable Hospital Project will receive a grant to continue providing technical support to hospitals interested in reducing mercury and other hazardous materials from their waste stream. The Sustainable Hospital web site is a valuable resource for hospitals throughout the country.

We also plan to provide two grants to address mercury in auto switches. One is to support the work Maine DEP is doing to educate auto recyclers about their legislative requirements to remove mercury switches from automobiles. A separate effort by the Northeast Recycling Coalition is looking at the different models for removing mercury switches from autos. This effort will be developing a stake-holder process workgroup to assess the different models that have been used around the country.

EPA NE provided an education grant to the New

England Aquarium to produce display material for mercury education. These museum-quality educational displays will visit each of the New England states. We plan to coordinate their visits with other mercury activities in the Region.

EPA NE is working with the interstate organizations and the USGS on developing a regional mercury model to gain a better understanding of how mercury deposition interacts with watersheds and results in unsafe levels of mercury in fish. This will be a multi-year project and we hope to meet with the states early next year to begin planning this project.

#### **Report on Mercury Emissions from Utilities**

On October 30, 2002, the Utility MACT Working Group’s Final Report regarding air toxics regulations for electric utilities was presented to the Clean Air Act Advisory Committee. The workgroup included a number of environmental stakeholders, electric generating companies, and representatives of state and local governments. The Final Report presents various positions on determining the MACT floor, the form of the MACT standard, and compliance monitoring, as well as whether to set standards for hazardous air pollutants other than mercury. EPA is scheduled to propose a regulation by December 2003.

#### **Methylmercury Contamination in Fish**

A number of physicians and scientists met last October in Burlington, Vermont to discuss new information on fish consumption and exposure to methylmercury. Fish consumption advisory information is being ignored by the “non-sensitive” sub-populations, men and women no longer of childbearing age. A number of cases of mercury in blood at levels above the reference dose have been identified. Findings were presented that adult exposure resulted in impacts on neurological functioning. But the good news is that blood mercury levels decreased, as well as reporting of symptoms, as consumption of mercury contaminated fish ceased. A recommendation was made that clinical guidelines should be developed to identify the new at risk population who should be tested.

EPA New England  
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